



2011 Legislative Agenda Podcast – recorded December 2010
Dr. Tony Bennett, Superintendent of Public Instruction

Recently, the Indiana Department of Education (IDOE) unveiled Indiana's 2011 Education Agenda. Every part of this agenda focuses on the education community's top priority: putting students first. Working together, I believe we can ensure Hoosier students benefit from innovative policies that identify and reward great teachers and principals, ensure real accountability and flexibility, and offer high quality options for all families.

Since the start of the school year I have had the opportunity to meet with thousands of Hoosier educators and students during classroom visits and teacher forums. I've enjoyed answering questions and receiving feedback on many of IDOE's most important initiatives. As you review our 2011 legislative agenda I think you will be pleased to see much of your feedback has been incorporated into our proposals.

Just before the holidays, I sat down with Indiana State Teachers Association (ISTA) President Nate Schnellenberger. While Nate was already aware of the basic tenets of the agenda, we were able to spend some time talking in greater detail about where we might find some agreement. Though Nate and I both understand IDOE and ISTA will encounter some philosophical differences in the months ahead, there are also areas where we will agree about the best way to approach the reforms. We look forward to continuing our discussions throughout the legislative session as we work to ensure Indiana's students receive the high quality education they deserve.

In an effort to elevate the level of dialogue taking place and ensure that discussions focus on the policies directly impacting student success, Nate and I decided it would be valuable to provide teachers with as much up-to-date information as possible. As a follow-up to my pre-holiday email message to educators which outlined key legislative proposals, I would like to take a few minutes to focus on specific details of those proposals. I also want to address some of the misconceptions surrounding the 2011 Education Agenda.

As we dig deeper into this discussion, I want to make sure one thing is clear: I know Indiana's schools are full of great teachers who demonstrate a rigorous work ethic and an incredible talent for driving student growth. My goal is to ensure all Hoosier students benefit from the type of instruction these teachers provide on a daily basis.

Unfortunately, not all children are lucky enough to attend great schools. In Indiana, over 24,000 students are trapped in chronically underperforming schools. While some simply want me to be a cheerleader for the many islands of excellence that exist in our system, I cannot ignore the plight of Hoosier children who aren't receiving the quality instruction they deserve.

At times, the context of this tough message has been eroded. As a result, good teachers are sometimes lumped together with ineffective teachers, and I am truly sorry this occurs. I have always said there are schools and school corporations providing exemplary academic instruction across this state, and if you take a few moments to review our efforts from the past two years, you will find numerous examples of IDOE shining a spotlight on excellence. Furthermore, I have always maintained there are great teachers driving student success in Indiana's schools and have worked hard to recognize them publicly.

At the same time, I have been honest in my assessment of our efforts to prepare all students for college and career success. There are teachers out there who are in need of improvement in certain areas, and for the sake of our students, we must offer them useful and constructive feedback to help them develop into effective teachers. Unfortunately, there are also teachers in our schools who do not provide quality instruction and who fail to improve when given the opportunity to do so. These teachers, as small a minority as they may be, should not continue to teach in Indiana classrooms. **I will never walk away from my belief that all children deserve access to equal educational opportunities.**

As I outline some of the misconceptions surrounding our "Putting Students First" agenda, please keep in mind IDOE has been fielding questions from teachers and administrators regarding these statements via email and during recent visits with educators all over Indiana. During my recent meeting with Nate, we agreed it would be helpful for IDOE to address these myths quickly in an effort to provide you with as much information as possible as you begin to evaluate the most important pieces of IDOE's legislative agenda. Thank you for listening and let's get started.

Myth # 1: Indiana's Education Agenda calls for the repeal of collective bargaining rights.

This statement is completely false. IDOE has not advocated for the repeal of collective bargaining rights, and our legislative agenda will not include language that calls for the elimination of collective bargaining rights.

To be clear, our agenda does aim to focus collective bargaining agreements between school corporations and teachers unions on salaries and wage-related benefits – and we believe this will help ensure Indiana's great teachers are getting paid what they deserve to get paid. This step is meant to clear the bureaucratic underbrush that causes teacher contracts to get bogged down on unnecessary items such as the color of classroom walls or the size of the bulletin boards in teachers' lounges.

Myth # 2: Indiana's Education Agenda deducts money from teacher retirement funds to avoid further cuts to Indiana schools.

There is no truth to this statement. No one at IDOE has had a discussion surrounding this topic, and I promise no one will.

I believe there are many important discussions to be held during the upcoming legislative session. Everyone's opinion should be valued, and everyone deserves a seat at the table. But false statements

meant to stir up fear have no place in this discussion. I would ask that anyone who comes across this rumor, or one of a similar nature, have the courage to dispel this false statement and re-focus the discussion on the important issues which will impact student achievement.

Myth # 3: Indiana's Education Agenda mandates an evaluation system that will evaluate teachers based solely on students' ISTEP+ scores.

IDOE does not support evaluation tools that only take into account student performance on standardized tests. IDOE continues to advocate for a teacher evaluation system that takes into account multiple measures including student growth and student engagement. We have always said students' academic growth should be part of a comprehensive evaluation system that examines multiple factors.

Myth # 4: Indiana's Education Agenda mandates equal percentages of teachers be placed into four performance categories during the evaluation process or places them into categories using a bell curve.

This is absolutely false. The IDOE advocates creating four evaluation categories for teachers and principals (highly effective, effective, improvement necessary, and ineffective). While teachers will be placed into categories based on several performance indicators, there is no model that mandates 25% of teachers be placed into each category. Such a model would be statistically invalid.

What we do know is that Indiana's current teacher evaluation systems rates 99% of teachers as effective or above. While I have no doubt that many of our teachers are effective, no profession has a 99% effective rating. Our current system is statistically invalid and must be refined to provide teachers with helpful feedback that encourages improvement and rewards success.

Myth # 5: Indiana's Education Agenda forces schools and school corporations to use a one-size-fits-all evaluation tool.

This couldn't be further from the truth. Indiana's Education Agenda aims to increase local control by allowing school corporations to use evaluation tools that work best within their school communities. IDOE will provide helpful guardrails that focus on educator qualities that drive student success. But there will not be a one-size-fits-all tool or rubric.

For months, IDOE has been working with teachers, administrators, education policy groups, teachers' union representatives, and higher education representatives to develop a model evaluation tool and implementation plan which will be made available to all Indiana school districts. Each district will then have the opportunity to adopt the state's model or develop its own tool and plan using state guidelines. IDOE also hopes to provide implementation support, particularly for struggling schools.

Myth #6: Indiana's Education Agenda reduces teacher salaries.

IDOE's legislative proposals do not aim to reduce teacher salaries. Rather, the proposals seek to enable local school corporations to set up systems to reward teachers for driving student growth. School corporations should have the opportunity to reward their best teachers, and the policies supported by IDOE will allow them to do so.

Myth #7: Indiana's Education Agenda takes tenure away from teachers who already have it.

There is no plan to take away tenure from teachers who have earned it under the current system. IDOE does, though, support a revamped tenure process for incoming teachers wherein job security and protections are based on performance rather than just seniority.

I hope you have found this video helpful and informative. I trust that you will use this information and the legislative documents provided via email to guide you as you develop an informed opinion regarding IDOE's efforts to reward great teachers and principals, ensure real accountability and flexibility, and offer high quality options for all families.

Once again, thank you for all of your hard work on behalf of Indiana's students. I look forward to receiving your feedback as we seek to take Indiana education to new heights.